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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1720 (2006) of 31 October 2006, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 April 2007. In that resolution, the Council requested the Secretary-General to provide a report on the situation in Western Sahara before the end of the mandate period. The present report covers developments since the issuance of my report dated 16 October 2006 (S/2006/817).

II. Recent Developments in Western Sahara

2. In a statement made on 6 November 2006, King Mohammed VI of Morocco confirmed that his Government was developing an autonomy proposal, with a view to finding a political solution to the question of Western Sahara. He indicated that the ongoing consultations on this initiative would be completed on a broad basis. In this regard, he stated that Morocco remained strongly committed to cooperating with the United Nations in its efforts to find a consensual political solution to which all parties concerned with the dispute could adhere.

3. On 8 March 2007, the Secretary General of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra de Rio de Oro (Frente Polisario), Mohammed Abdelaziz, handed me a document summarizing the position of the Frente Polisario, which is that the question of Western Sahara is a decolonization problem that should be resolved on the basis of the implementation of the principle of self-determination, and that the solution to the conflict lies in the exercise of the legitimate right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara by means of a referendum.

4. On 14 March 2007, I met with the envoys of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, Taieb Fassi Fihri, Moroccan Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Fouad Ali El Himma, Moroccan Minister Delegate of the Interior, Khalihenna Ould Errachid, Chairman of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs, and Mohamed Yassine Mansouri, Director General of the Direction of Studies and Documentation, who provided some details on the autonomy proposal being prepared by Morocco.

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5. On 19 March, Mohammed Bedjaoui, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, transmitted to me a message from President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, underscoring the responsibility of the United Nations vis-à-vis the people of Western Sahara and its obligation to carry out the decolonization process to be completed with the holding of a free and fair referendum of self-determination under the authority of the United Nations.

6. On 10 April, I received a letter from the Representative of the Frente Polisario in New York, Ahmed Boukhari, transmitting a "Proposal of the Frente Polisario for a mutually acceptable political solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara".

7. On 11 April, I met with the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, El Mostafa Sahel, who gave me a letter dated 10 April 2007, transmitting to me a document entitled "Moroccan initiative for negotiating an autonomy statute for the Sahara region" containing the initiative by King Mohamed VI of Morocco on the autonomy proposal on which Morocco has dedicated effort for some months. In the covering letter, the Moroccan initiative is characterized as a proposal that can serve as a basis for dialogue, negotiation and compromise.

8. I welcome every effort from the parties that can advance the possibility of achieving a just and mutually acceptable solution that will provide self-determination for the people of Western Sahara. I encourage the parties to enter into negotiations in good faith without preconditions.

III. Activities of my Personal Envoy

9. During the period under review, my Personal Envoy, Peter van Walsum, held consultations in New York with the representatives of the two parties, Morocco and the Frente Polisario, as well as with the representatives of the neighbouring countries, Algeria and Mauritania.

10. During his various meetings, my Personal Envoy listened to the concerns and positions of the parties and neighbouring countries with regard to the way out of the current impasse. He underlined once again that the negotiations between Morocco and the Frente Polisario, recommended in the report of the Secretary-General of 16 October 2006 (S/2006/817, para. 61), would have the objective of achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. Subsequent to his consultations, my Personal Envoy informed me that the question remained at an impasse due to a lack of agreement on how to enable the people of Western Sahara to exercise their right to self-determination.

11. In February and March 2007, my Personal Envoy also consulted the representatives of interested Member States, including Spain, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America in New York, after which he briefly visited Madrid, Paris and Washington, D.C. He detected a general wish to find a way out of the current impasse and to reach a solution that would at last enable the people of Western Sahara to exercise their right to self-determination. In all his discussions about Western Sahara with members of the Security Council, my Personal Envoy has never heard any argument causing him to revise either the analysis or the conclusion

contained in his briefing to the Council of 18 January 2006 and later summarized in the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council of 16 October 2006 (S/2006/817, para. 12). Briefly, his analysis was that the Security Council had consistently made it clear that it would not impose a solution to the question of Western Sahara, which had led him to the conclusion that there were only two options: either indefinite prolongation of the impasse, or negotiations without preconditions between the parties aimed at achieving a mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

12. It was on this conclusion that my predecessor, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, had based his aforementioned recommendation of 16 October 2006. My Personal Envoy reminded me that, in its meeting of 31 October 2006, the Security Council had not rejected or criticized that recommendation, but had simply failed to act on it. Accordingly, taking into account that his analysis and conclusion had not been contested by any member of the Security Council, my Personal Envoy thought it might be advisable for me to make exactly the same recommendation.

IV. Activities on the ground

A. Military

13. As at 31 March 2007, the military component of MINURSO stood at 228 personnel, including administrative personnel and medical unit officers, against the authorized strength of 230. During the period under review, in an effort to increase the number of Arabic-speaking military observers, four military observers from Yemen were deployed to the Mission. They arrived on 31 January 2007. Despite extensive efforts by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to increase the number of female officers in the Mission, regrettably only one woman military observer (Mongolia) served in MINURSO during the period under review. I would welcome a larger deployment of female personnel by troop-contributing countries to MINURSO, for operational reasons and in order to improve the Mission's gender balance.

14. The overall situation in the area of responsibility remained generally calm. Under the command of Major General Kurt Mosgaard (Denmark), the military component of MINURSO continued to monitor the ceasefire, which has been in effect since 6 September 1991, in accordance with military agreement No. 1 between the Royal Moroccan Army and MINURSO, on the one hand, and the Frente Polisario military forces and MINURSO, on the other. These military agreements divide Western Sahara into five areas, including a 5-kilometre-wide buffer strip east of the berm, two restricted areas (25 kilometres east and 30 kilometres west of the berm, respectively) and two areas of limited restriction that encompass the remainder of Western Sahara. Various restrictions on military activities and personnel apply in these areas.

15. During the reporting period, MINURSO performed 4,246 ground patrols and 289 air patrols to visit and inspect units of the Royal Moroccan Army and the military forces of the Frente Polisario and to monitor adherence to the military agreements. The increase in the number of patrols as compared to earlier years is the result of changes in the Mission's military structure and procedures, as explained in

previous reports to the Council (see S/2005/648, S/2006/249 and S/2006/817). These changes have enhanced the operational efficiency of MINURSO and improved its ability to monitor the maintenance of the ceasefire.

16. MINURSO continued to enjoy good relations with both the Royal Moroccan Army and the Frente Polisario armed forces. However, the two parties continued to abstain from direct meetings with each other and all known contacts between them were conducted via meetings and written communications with MINURSO as an intermediary. The MINURSO proposal to establish a joint military verification commission (see S/2006/249, para. 11), designed to build confidence between the parties, has in principle been welcomed by the Frente Polisario, but the Royal Moroccan Army has not so far responded.

17. Violations of military agreement No. 1 by both parties remain at the same level as compared to the previous reporting period. From 6 October 2006 to 31 March 2007, MINURSO observed and recorded eight new violations by the Royal Moroccan Army and seven new violations by the military forces of the Frente Polisario. Violations by the Royal Moroccan Army included the presence of a military element in the buffer strip on 10 October 2006, and the construction of ammunition stores in the restricted area in February 2007; violations by the Frente Polisario included the concentration of forces during the military parade held in the area of limited restriction in Tifariti on 27 February 2007, and the claim that mines had been laid in the restricted area in November 2006.

18. MINURSO continued to observe long-standing violations by both parties. These included the presence of radar equipment and improvement of the defence infrastructure, including expansions of the berm by the Royal Moroccan Army, and the continued deployment of military personnel and infrastructure improvements by the Frente Polisario in the area known as the "Spanish Fort", as described in my report to the Security Council of 27 January 2005 (S/2005/49, para. 6).

19. As explained in my previous report to the Council (S/2006/817, para. 26), since the start of the Mission's mandate, both parties have imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement of MINURSO military observers. The restrictions primarily relate to the denial of entry into the parties' strong points and units to verify unit strength, weapons systems and maintenance of the status quo. On 1 June 2006, MINURSO began recording restrictions on freedom of movement of military observers as violations of military agreement No. 1. Despite agreement by the Frente Polisario to lift all restrictions, only one military region (military region 2 in Tifariti) has granted MINURSO military observers full freedom of movement. Two freedom of movement violations were committed by the Frente Polisario in another military region (military region 4 in Mehaires) during the reporting period. The remaining four military regions have yet to grant full freedom of movement. With regard to the Royal Moroccan Army, restrictions have been lifted in the Awsard subsector but remain in place in all others. During the period from 6 October 2006 to 31 March 2007, 473 freedom of movement violations were recorded on the part of the Royal Moroccan Army and 128 on the part of the Frente Polisario. The presence of greater numbers of Royal Moroccan Army strong points and units explains, to some extent, the higher number of violations on its part. Ambiguous wording of military agreement No. 1 was referred to by the Royal Moroccan Army as the explanation for their continued violations to the principle of unrestricted

freedom of movement. However, further improvements are necessary from both sides to enable MINURSO to carry out its monitoring functions more effectively.

20. With regard to military agreements Nos. 2 and 3, both parties continued to extend cooperation to MINURSO in the marking and disposal of mines and unexploded ordnance and expired ammunition. During the period under review, MINURSO discovered and marked 93 mines and pieces of unexploded ordnance and 13 cluster bomb-contaminated areas. MINURSO monitored the destruction by both parties of 3,513 such devices, including a stockpile of 3,321 anti-personnel landmines by the Frente Polisario on 27 February, which was facilitated by Landmine Action, a United Kingdom non-governmental organization.

21. The abundant presence of mines and unexploded ordnance throughout Western Sahara, including areas where MINURSO military observers and logistical vehicles operate on a daily basis, is a cause of serious concern. Since 1991, MINURSO military observers have been victims of three mine accidents and the introduction of night operations has increased the risk of further accidents. This raises new force protection issues that need to be addressed by MINURSO through implementation of mine action and unexploded ordnance disposal activities, which are essential to provide an adequate level of safety to United Nations personnel working in Western Sahara. The safety of the local population is also at continued risk. Each month civilians and their livestock are killed or injured in mine accidents and the numbers are likely to increase in the event that refugees begin to return. In the month of January 2007 alone, mine accidents in the Territory resulted in several deaths, including that of a young girl, a member of the Royal Consultative Council for Saharan Affairs and a Moroccan parliamentarian. On 28 March two soldiers of the Royal Moroccan Army were killed, and another was seriously injured, when their vehicle hit an anti-tank mine near Oum Dreyga. These tragic events underline the vulnerability of all members of society to the threat of mines.

22. In an effort to respond to this threat, on 15 January 2007, the Royal Moroccan Army, deploying considerable resources, began a comprehensive mine-clearing operation in Western Sahara from the Atlantic coast to the berm.

23. MINURSO, for its part, has put new emphasis on reducing the risk of mines and unexploded ordnance for all by establishing a mine action cell, which, since January 2006, has engaged in mine action coordination through several complementary avenues of cooperation. With support from the Mine Action Service, the Mission has been organizing activities to reduce the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance and to raise awareness of the issue with the parties and among the wider population in the Territory and in the Tindouf refugee camps. MINURSO has also established contact with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Mauritania and the Mauritanian authorities to exchange information and facilitate mine clearance activities along the border between the Territory and Mauritania and to initiate regional mine awareness programmes.

24. To fully cooperate with potential mine-clearing non-governmental organizations in the Territory, MINURSO plans to utilize version 4 of the Information Management System for Mine Action database system. To date, the MINURSO mine action cell has been staffed with two military officers. The work is highly specialized and requires both knowledge and field experience. If MINURSO capacities in this regard are to be preserved, civilian staff will be required to supplement the work of individual United Nations military observers, whose tours

of duty last only 6 to 12 months. The inclusion of civilian staff would enable MINURSO to retain the institutional memory and technical expertise so vital to this area of work. Requests for civilian posts for the mine action cell will be included in the 2008/09 MINURSO budget.

25. Since its deployment to Western Sahara in August 2006, Landmine Action has embarked on a comprehensive mine and unexploded ordnance survey as well as clearance of areas east of the berm, with cooperative support from the Mine Action Service and MINURSO. As at 31 March 2007, Landmine Action had assisted the Frente Polisario with the destruction of stockpiles of 6,757 anti-personnel mines in line with the Geneva Call's "Deed of commitment" for non-State actors, which the Frente Polisario signed on 3 November 2005 (S/2006/249, para. 14). Landmine Action has also surveyed 78 designated dangerous areas and marked 112 spots indicating the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance in areas east of the berm.

26. Activities by Landmine Action have been substantially funded by the Mine Action Service since August 2006, with the shortfall being met by the Princess of Wales Memorial Fund. Landmine Action secured all the necessary equipment for the start-up phase of the programme. In order to secure the continuation of the comprehensive mine action programme east of the berm for 2007, donor funding will be required. I call upon donors to contribute generously to the mine-clearing activities of Landmine Action, which are essential to providing a safe environment for the local population and for United Nations military and civilian personnel. A contribution from MINURSO funds will also be required to ensure the threat-grading of MINURSO patrol and logistical supply routes and mine and unexploded ordnance clearing of areas where MINURSO wishes to establish facilities.

27. MINURSO undertook several activities during the reporting period to ensure the safety of United Nations personnel and to further enhance its military capabilities, including procurement of modern night vision equipment, marking of tracks, improvement of casualty evacuation procedures and production of more accurate maps. Since its deployment in 1991, MINURSO has been operating on the basis of outdated large-scale aerial maps. In an environment affected by the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance, this has been a risky situation for MINURSO military observers patrolling the desert. Further, it has imposed severe limitations on the Mission's ability to support the mine and unexploded ordnance-clearing activities of the parties and non-governmental organizations. To address this situation, a Geographic Information Systems cell was established in MINURSO in June 2006 (see S/2006/817, para. 29) with advice, technical and training support from the Cartographic Section of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Mission in Liberia. The cell is still in its infancy and is primarily staffed by military observers, but it has been able to develop and produce the first updated maps of critical areas. The Mission plans to further enhance these maps utilizing satellite imagery, data from Global Positioning System equipment in MINURSO vehicles as well as other available data.

B. Prisoners of war, other detainees and persons unaccounted for

28. The International Committee of the Red Cross continues to work with the parties in accounting for those who are still missing in relation to the conflict.

C. Assistance to Western Saharan refugees

29. The assistance programme to the Saharan refugees, including food distribution, continues to support those deemed most vulnerable in the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria.

30. With funding from the European Commission, the primary school infrastructure that was heavily damaged by the floods in February 2006 was reconstructed under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The water distribution system, hitherto supplied by tankers in most camps, is being gradually replaced by more efficient and safe, piped water systems. Hygiene will thereby be improved and the risk of infectious diseases reduced. During the reporting period, a second stage of the safer water supply system was under construction. A third stage will be implemented in 2007 and a master plan for safe water adduction will be designed during the year.

31. In January 2007, UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) sent a joint assessment mission to Tindouf to verify the food requirements of the Saharan refugees for the coming two years. The mission recommended that the refugees should continue to receive emergency food assistance. Pending a registration of refugees, the caseload would be established at 90,000 beneficiaries. In line with the recommendation of the mission, 35,000 supplementary rations would also be distributed to women of child-bearing age, malnourished children under 5 years and schoolchildren, in order to address serious problems of chronic malnutrition and anaemia among these particularly vulnerable sectors of the camps' population.

32. The food pipeline has been very fragile since September 2006, when the food security stock in Rabouni, Algeria, was liquidated and not replaced, due to lack of funding. Over 8,000 metric tonnes of food commodities for the refugee camps are required for the coming six months, but funding has not yet been pledged. I call upon donors to contribute generously to the Saharan refugee assistance programme, including the feeding operation, in order to make the living conditions of the refugees tolerable and to prevent further interruptions in their food distribution.

D. Confidence-building measures

33. I am pleased to report that on 3 November 2006, after a six-month hiatus, UNHCR and MINURSO were able to resume the programme of exchange of family visits between the Territory and the refugee camps in the Tindouf area. The programme continues to run smoothly and with the full cooperation of the parties. From the start of the programme in 2004 until March 2007, 3,219 individuals, 60 per cent of whom were women, benefited from the programme. Given the high level of interest shown by the Saharan population on both sides of the berm to participate in the exchange of family visits, UNHCR and MINURSO continue to explore with the parties the possibility of expanding the programme by increasing the number of beneficiaries per visit as well as the overall number of family visits.

34. The four free telephone centres connecting the Tindouf refugee camps and the Territory continued to operate successfully throughout the reporting period, with over 66,000 calls having been made by refugees to their relatives in the Territory since the service began in 2004. Unfortunately, funding constraints continue to

impede efforts to install a telephone centre in Dakhla Camp, which is situated some 180 kilometres from Tindouf.

35. MINURSO continues to play an important role in supporting the implementation of the programme of confidence-building measures. Up to eight round-trip flights are undertaken each month in MINURSO aircraft, while MINURSO personnel are responsible for check-in and baggage-handling operations. When available, a doctor or nurse from the MINURSO Malaysian Medical Unit accompanies each flight. In addition, MINURSO provides six United Nations police officers to facilitate airport procedures at arrival and departure points and to accompany UNHCR staff on their visits to beneficiaries. The police officers are also present in the refugee camps in Tindouf and in towns in the Territory for the duration of the family visits. MINURSO also continues to provide critical logistical, security and administrative support to UNHCR in the implementation of the confidence-building measures programme.

36. The confidence-building measures, which address the special needs of those families who have been separated by the conflict for over 30 years, are highly valued, not only by the Saharan population but also by the parties. However, a delay in donor response to the UNHCR special appeal for this operation may soon endanger its continuation. Without the requisite funding, the programme would be forced to close in May 2007. Therefore, I call upon the donor community to continue to support this valuable humanitarian initiative.

E. Irregular migrants

37. By October 2006, only 13 migrants remained in Bir Lahlou under the care of the Frente Polisario. The group was all that remained of a much larger one to whom MINURSO had provided emergency assistance in late 2005. On 2 November 2006, MINURSO facilitated the transfer by the Frente Polisario of a Nigerian migrant from Bir Lahlou, through Mijek, to the border with Mauritania, where he was handed over to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for voluntary repatriation. Right of transit through Mauritania having been granted by the Mauritanian authorities on 8 November, IOM was able to facilitate the migrant's return to Nigeria. Subsequently, on 9 February 2007, MINURSO again facilitated the transport of five migrants from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Mali to the Mauritanian border, where they were repatriated by IOM. By 8 February 2007, only seven migrants remained in Bir Lahlou, including four migrants from Ghana and one each from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and the Gambia. MINURSO will continue to provide ad hoc humanitarian assistance to migrants, as the need arises.

38. In December 2006, several non-governmental organizations condemned the reported rounding up by Moroccan authorities of some 400 irregular migrants from towns in Western Sahara and elsewhere, claiming that Moroccan authorities had attempted to force them over the border into Algeria. On 3 December 2006, the Secretary General of the Frente Polisario, Mr. Abdelaziz, wrote to my predecessor, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in connection with the deaths of some 90 Saharans, who had reportedly drowned while attempting to cross by boat from Western Sahara to Spain. I call upon all concerned to cooperate in upholding their humanitarian obligations towards migrants identified within their respective territories.

F. Human Rights

39. During the period under review, demonstrations by Saharans calling for respect for human rights and the right to self-determination are reported to have continued in the Territory. On 11 December 2006, Secretary General Abdelaziz wrote to my predecessor, Secretary-General Annan, to protest the "brutal repression" and arrest of demonstrators by Moroccan security forces during protests to mark International Human Rights Day. Subsequently, on 3 and 21 February 2007, respectively, I received letters from Mr. Abdelaziz, protesting the "brutal intervention" by Moroccan forces following demonstrations in Laayoune, and calling for the immediate release of 38 Saharan prisoners, who had been on a hunger strike in Laayoune's "Carcel Negra" prison since 30 January, in protest of their conditions of detention. On 3 March, the prisoners reportedly suspended their hunger strike. On 2 April, Mr. Abdelaziz wrote to me again with regard to his continuing concerns about alleged human rights abuses in the Territory. On 9 April, I received a letter from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations, expressing concern about increasing alleged human rights violations in the Saharan refugee camps near Tindouf, in Algeria. He also referred to allegations by international non-governmental organizations of a deterioration of the human rights situation in the camps.

40. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has continued to follow the human rights situation in Western Sahara and the Tindouf camps and remains committed to ensure that the rights of the people of Western Sahara are fully protected. OHCHR continued to receive information alleging that human rights defenders' trials were falling short of international fair trial standards. Allegations received from several sources also related to incidents where the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly appear to have been compromised.

G. Restructuring and administration of the Mission

41. Pursuant to a security assessment conducted in December 2005 (see S/2006/249, para. 27), the Department of Safety and Security recommended that MINURSO implement a number of measures to bring it within minimum operating security standards, among which were the erection of high security walls, the installation of a security lighting system and the construction of barriers at the Mission headquarters, its logistics base in Laayoune, the liaison office in Tindouf, and in all team sites. While most of the projects have been completed in the team sites, the Mission has not yet received permission from local authorities to erect the recommended high walls and security barriers in the Mission's headquarters and the logistics base in Laayoune. On 15 March 2007, MINURSO and representatives of the local security services in Laayoune met formally for the first time. Further to that meeting, and in accordance with current peacekeeping practices, regular liaison meetings between representatives of MINURSO and local security services will henceforth be held on a monthly basis.

42. In order to ensure the required water supply for military observers, the Mission is drilling a well at the Bir Lahlou team site and plans for additional wells are under consideration. At present, the Mission's concept for logistical support to the team sites is based on the premise that fixed-wing air transport is possible to seven of the

nine team sites, using local airstrips. However, most airstrips have been closed for maintenance for prolonged periods during the past two years, with consequent disruption of the logistical supply chain. Together with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, MINURSO is considering whether to upgrade the airstrips, thereby reducing the need for maintenance, or to put in place alternatives for the provision of logistical support.

H. Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

43. In its resolution 1720 (2006), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to continue to take the necessary measures to ensure full compliance in MINURSO with the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. In the past six months, no case of sexual exploitation and abuse was reported. However, serious efforts are ongoing to address issues related to conduct and discipline cases involving MINURSO personnel, which occurred in the past, including cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. On 1 February, the Mission's first Conduct and Discipline Officer assumed her duties in the Mission. She has since focused, inter alia, on further developing the training programme on United Nations standards relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, which began in 2006 for all members of the Mission. Efforts are continuing to address this issue, which is a priority for my new Special Representative, Julian Harston. In addition, a new welfare and recreation programme is being developed to alleviate the difficulties associated with the particular environment in which MINURSO operates.

V. African Union

44. During the reporting period, the observer delegation of the African Union to MINURSO, led by its Senior Representative, Yilma Tadesse (Ethiopia), continued to provide support and cooperation to the Mission. I wish to reiterate my appreciation to the African Union for its contribution.

VI. Financial aspects

45. The General Assembly, by its resolution 60/280, appropriated the amount of $44.5 million gross for the maintenance of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007. Therefore, should the Security Council approve my recommendation set out in paragraph 53 below as to the extension of the mandate of MINURSO, the cost for the operation and maintenance of the Mission during the extension period will be limited to the resources approved by the Assembly.

46. As at 31 December 2006, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for MINURSO amounted to $52.1 million. As a result of the outstanding assessed contributions, the Organization has not been in a position to reimburse the Governments providing troops for the troop costs incurred since April 2002. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at 31 December 2006 amounted to $1,889.6 million.

VII. Observations and recommendations

47. **I recommend that the Security Council call upon the parties, Morocco and the Frente Polisario, to enter into negotiations without preconditions, with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The neighbouring countries, Algeria and Mauritania, should also be invited to the negotiations and be consulted separately on issues directly affecting them, in accordance with the format that was observed during the tenure of my previous Personal Envoy, James A. Baker, III.**

48. **I welcome the continued reduction in the number of violations by the parties to military agreement No. 1, which defines the ceasefire regime. However, the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of United Nations military observers who seek to visit units, headquarters and strong points for verification purposes have continued. It is the responsibility of the parties to ensure that violations are not committed by their military/security forces, and I would encourage the parties to lift all restrictions and extend their full cooperation to MINURSO in order to maintain the ceasefire. In that regard, and as previously noted (S/2006/817, para. 56), I would encourage the parties to clarify any issues that may be subject to different interpretations and to ensure that basic peacekeeping principles are upheld.**

49. **I welcome the fact that both parties have begun operations to clear the Territory of mines and unexploded ordnance as well as their cooperation with MINURSO in this regard. These activities could provide an opportunity for increased cooperation and confidence-building between the parties. Therefore, I would encourage both parties to work with MINURSO to establish direct cooperation and communication through a joint military verification commission and other forums to facilitate their work on mine clearance and other issues of common interest.**

50. **I welcome the intention of MINURSO to provide increased support in the areas of mine risk education and victim assistance, which could prove valuable and relatively inexpensive multipliers in the security and effectiveness of the Mission. MINURSO activities in this area will have a direct positive effect on the safety of United Nations personnel as well as operate as an indirect force protection measure through increased understanding by the local population of the Mission's role and presence. As part of its core mandate, MINURSO has identified the need to add demining activities, which cannot be funded through voluntary contributions as these are ongoing and operational activities.**

51. **The human dimension of the conflict, including the plight of the Western Saharan refugees, is a continuing concern. In this context, I am pleased that the exchange of family visits between the Territory and the refugee camps in the Tindouf area has resumed. Building on the success of these visits, I am encouraged by recent indications that the parties concerned are exploring the possibility of increasing the number of beneficiaries of this programme. Therefore, I urge the donor community to contribute generously to this valuable humanitarian confidence-building measure.**

52. **I would like to repeat the call made by my predecessor (S/2006/817, para. 60) that the parties remain engaged in continuous and constructive dialogue with OHCHR with a view to ensuring respect for the human rights of the people of Western Sahara. I would also like to reiterate that, although MINURSO does not have the mandate or resources to address this issue, the United Nations remains committed to upholding international human rights standards.**

53. **In the existing circumstances on the ground, and in the light of my Personal Envoy's continuing efforts, I believe that the presence of MINURSO remains indispensable for the maintenance of the ceasefire in Western Sahara. Therefore, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of MINURSO for a further period of six months, until 31 October 2007.**

54. **In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to my Personal Envoy, Peter van Walsum, for his continuing efforts in search of a solution to the question of Western Sahara. I also wish to thank my new Special Representative, Julian Harston, and the Force Commander, Major General Kurt Mosgaard (Denmark), as well as the men and women of MINURSO for their work, under difficult conditions, to fulfil the Mission's mandate.**

United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

Contributions as at 29 March 2007

	Military			
Country	*Observers*[a]	*Troops*[a]	*Civilian police*[b]	*Total*
Argentina	1	—	—	1
Austria	2	—	—	2
Bangladesh	7	0	0	7
China	16	0	0	16
Croatia	6	0	0	6
Denmark[c]	2	0	0	2
Egypt	23	0	3	26
El Salvador	6	0	3	9
France	17	0	0	17
Ghana	10	7	0	17
Greece	1	0	0	1
Guinea	7	0	0	7
Honduras	12	0	0	12
Hungary	7	0	0	7
Ireland	3	0	0	3
Italy	5	0	0	5
Kenya	6	0	0	6
Malaysia	11	20	0	31
Mongolia	3	0	0	3
Nigeria	6	0	0	6
Pakistan	8	0	0	8
Poland	1	0	0	1
Russian Federation	25	0	0	25
Sri Lanka	2	0	0	2
Uruguay	8	0	0	8
Yemen	4	0	0	4
Total	**199**	**27**	**6**	**232**

[a] Authorized strength is 231.
[b] Authorized strength is 6.
[c] Includes the Force Commander.

Map No. 3691 Rev. 54 UNITED NATIONS
April 2007

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section